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ABSTRACT

The efforts of the Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development in improving the professional standards of elementary-secondary teachers are discussed. Operating since March 1976, the Center focuses on staff development activities linking inservice programs to teachers' and students' needs. Activities are decentralized, being offered on a college campus, at local schools, or at convenient locations for the 14,000 educators in its service area. Activities are of either direct response (teacher requested) or indirect response (city/system-wide) nature, with requests being processed by the Field Consultant Services outreach component of the system. Another outreach component, Special Project Schools, provides an identifiable research base for testing the hypothesis that staff development will lead to improved pupil achievement. Mathematics and Reading Resource Centers support these outreach components. Research and evaluation efforts to validate achievement improvement are undertaken to determine how best to convert new staff skills into improved classroom performance. Participant reaction to the project has been favorable. (HJB)

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THE DETROIT CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: A TEACHER CENTER FOR BRIDGING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GAP

Presented at the 58th Annual Meeting of ATE, January 31 - February 3, 1978

> No effort to solve current problems in schools and improve the quality of education in America will succeed until substantial progress is made in the area of inservice education of teachers. Teacher surplus accompanied by a reduction in teacher turnover lead to the inescapable conclusion that improvements in education will depend on the redeployment and retraining of present education personnel. The ability of teachers to deal with current issues and school problems will depend on their acquisition of new skills.[1]

Within the past decade, and particularly within the past year, educators have been confronted with ever-mounting evidence that the nation's school systems are failing to adequately educate many of America's children. High school graduates who can't read the print on their diplomas, a general and accelerating decline in college entrance examination scores, and parents suing educators for the incompetence of

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[1]Shirley A. Steele, "Study of Inservice Education," in Inservice, a publication of The National Council of States on Inservice Education, September 1976, p. 4.

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their children are but three symptoms that indicate grave maladies in academia, particularly K-12.

The problem is an educational one, but also economic and political issues are involved. "The More We Spend, The Less Children Learn" was the banner headline of a five-page article in the August 28, 1977 issue of The New York Times Magazine.[1] The lead paragraph declared:

> Last school year, Americans spent far more on all levels of education than they spent for defense; for primary and secondary schooling, the bill was $75 billion, more than four times the 1960 figure. . . . It is now clear, however, that all the money hasn't bought much. In crudest cost-benefit terms, the more parents have spent on schools, the less their children have learned. . . . In a sample of school systems we compiled which contained more than half the entire primary and secondary pupil population of the United States, from Rhode Island to Hawaii and from Michigan to Texas, generally the data showed that average achievement scores for all grades above third or fourth not only fell, but fell simultaneously. . . .

As the public is bombarded with such information along with "sure" solutions--in this article, it was to reinstate old traditions of teachings--the public often responds in the most direct way at its disposal. School millages are voted down; even maintenance funding may be denied. Countless school systems are at the brink of financial disaster.

Obviously, remedial steps must be taken to reverse the downward trend in student learning. Obviously, also, public

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[1] The New York Times Magazine article was adapted from "Our Children's Crippled Future: How American Education Has Failed" by Frank E. Armbruster with contributions by Paul Bracken, published in the August Quadrangle.

confidence in public educators needs to be restored. Where should the quest for action and direction begin? "Nobody can save us from us for us but us!" This is the challenge that the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the national president of Operation PUSH, often gives to audiences of high school youth. The same challenge may also apply to teachers. Indeed, if professional educators hope to maintain their credibility and the control of K-12 systems in the face of doomsayers, educators themselves must take the leadership in defining ways to improve pupil achievement. The quest for effective change mechanisms should be the major agenda in local school buildings, in school districts, and at every regional and national educational conference. It is most timely to pursue "A Search for Credibility".

This presentation is intended to present insights into how one teacher center, The Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development, is striving and meeting with success in narrowing "The Professional Development Gap" for Detroit educators.

Teacher centering is rapidly gaining credibility as a concept that facilitates a learning-sharing-developing-nurturing environment for teachers. Teacher centers are difficult to describe: in 1974, six hundred centers were called

by two hundred different titles.[1] The Schmeider-Yarger definition, which they labelled as "generally-specific", testifies to the importance of desired flexibility which permits each locale to create its center to address its unique circumstances:

> A place, in situ or in changing locations, which develops programs for the training and improvement of educational personnel (in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, administrators, para-professionals, college teachers, etc.) in which the participating personnel have an opportunity to share successes, to utilize a wide range of education resources, and to receive training specifically related to their most pressing teaching problems.[2]

Despite the variety of titles and definitions, teacher centers generally confront the real, "gut-level", teacher-identified needs:

1. To develop a continuous inservice support system for educators where varied educational experiences can lead to personal and professional growth

2. To improve the quality of learning and thinking for children by establishing a program that will bring more personal meaning into the learning process for teachers

3. To provide a more responsive environment where the free and open exchange of educational practices and issues can be developed

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[1] See Allen Schmeider and Sam Yarger, "Teacher/Teaching Centering in America," The Journal of Teacher Education, March 1976, p. 6.

[2] Ibid.

4. To involve the community, its institutions and its people in the educational process.[1]

Other commonalities in many teacher centers are their reliance on voluntary staff participation based on staffs' requests for service, availability of consultants and materials, and staff involvement in the structuring of training experiences.

As Ms. Eugenia Kimball, AFT, stated, "Teacher centers may be the first educational reform to come from teachers themselves." In the search for credibility in teacher education, therefore, centering has the potential for building upon the readiness of teachers to assume leadership for their own professional improvement. Because people learn best in settings where they are personally and willingly involved, it is no wonder that preliminary data indicate that teachers utilize center-learned skills in their classrooms more readily than they do skills taught in mandated inservice activities.[2]

The Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development, operational since March 1976 and the first state-

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[1]From The Teacher Center in Illinois--A Different Way to Grow, Upper Midwest Regional Interstate Research Project published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Barbara Thompson, Ph.D., State Superintendent, p. 14.

[2]William Drummond, University of Florida at Gainesville, cites this finding by Gordon Lawrence along with nine other significant ones in "An Open Letter to the Dean Re Inservice Education" in the May 1976 issue of Inservice, a publication of the National Council of States on Inservice Education, p. 6. Dr. Lawrence's findings are presented in his monograph, "Patterns of Effective Inservice Education," for the Florida Department of Education.

funded professional development center in Michigan, is a direct response to the challenge of improving student achievement through staff inservice activities.[1] The Center's target population are the fourteen thousand Detroit-area educators involved in the teaching/learning process. The major focus is to implement staff development models that link inservice experiences to educators' perceived and stated needs and to the learning needs of students. To accomplish this, The Center design is predicated on two basic assumptions:

1. The behavior of educational personnel is a major influenceable variable which affects the learning process, and

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[1]The Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development, presently one of three state-funded centers in Michigan, is part of the Michigan State Department of Education's comprehensive plan for staff development. A cornerstone of the plan is the eventual establishment of a network of teacher centers as a major vehicle for raising pupil achievement by upgrading the knowledge and skills of teachers.

Among the reasons that teacher centers were deemed crucial were:

1. Fewer new teachers entering the profession because of declining student enrollment
2. Awareness that ways needed to be found to maximize the teaching capabilities of existing personnel, a great percentage of whom had completed all required collegiate course work, had achieved tenure, and/or are at the top of the salary scale
3. Both professional and public alarm at the decline in pupil achievement on standardized tests
4. Recognition that colleges/schools of education graduate only beginning teachers and that new as well as experienced teachers need continuing access to a well-structured inservice program
5. Recognition that the combination of master teachers in public schools and colleges is a natural reservoir of excellent teacher trainers.

2. Providing opportunities which will increase the skills and meet the needs of staff members is one effective way to foster improved pupil learning.

Along with these assumptions are a set of beliefs which also undergird the design:

1. Most teachers want to increase their competence, want students to achieve, and will assume leadership and responsibility for their development when the proper opportunity is offered.
2. Teachers, like all human beings, accept best that training which they request, help design, and in which they voluntarily participate.
3. All educational personnel (teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, and supervisors) influence learning and, therefore, all should have the opportunity for continuing inservice.

Administrative offices of The Detroit Center are housed in The College of Education at Wayne State University, but services are offered on a decentralized basis. Activities are held at The College, at local schools, or any location that is convenient for Detroit staff members.

The assessment of needs is an important on-going process for ascertaining and establishing training priorities for a diverse population of teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators. Based on requests and needs, two categories of inservice activities are offered:

1. Direct response activities which are "tailor-made" for a specific school, group of staff members, or individual, and
2. Indirect response activities which are based on city-wide needs and offered on a system-wide basis.

The Center delivery system has four components:

The Field Consultant Services component is the principal outreach mechanism for soliciting service requests from all segments of the Detroit system. Resulting activities are often multi-session workshops or seminars where Center-provided consultant(s) may be someone from an extensive list of nationally known "experts", college instructors from southeastern Michigan, or Detroit/metropolitan-area public school master teachers.

The other outreach component, Special Project Schools, was established to provide an identifiable research base for testing the hypothesis that systematic staff development will lead to improved pupil achievement. At present, four schools are involved with The Center in a three-year, planned staff development process. Students in these schools--one elementary, two middle, and one senior high--will be followed in a three-year, longitudinal study that should yield significant data about the consequences of staff training.

Supporting the outreach components are Mathematics and Reading Resource Centers. Consultant specialists provide diagnostic services, a variety of resource materials, and

conduct demonstration lessons, workshops, and seminars.

The fourth component is Research and Evaluation. A significant long-range direction of The Detroit Center is that of conducting action research to determine how best to convert newly-learned staff skills into improved classroom performance so that student learning improves. Educators cannot, nor should we, seek to avoid evaluation and accountability. Getting public funds to inservice teachers who "should have learned how to teach in college, or ought to pay their own tuition for refresher courses--or be fired" is not an easy task. Centers must not only be able to show compelling needs, but also a convincing promise of positive result. The Detroit Center is no exception. Positive results are difficult to quantify. Yet, based on preliminary test data as well as empirical evidence, we believe that the longitudinal, systematic follow-up in classrooms with teachers who volunteer to participate will yield measurable increases in pupil achievement.

The receptivity to The Center by Detroit staff has been tremendous. Since March 1976,

-- Over twelve hundred training activities have been sponsored
-- Attended voluntarily and without stipends by over sixteen thousand persons (including repeaters), in spite of many system workshops for which stipends are paid

-- Representing over 86,000 training hours.

Such impressive numbers cannot be attributed simply to the Hawthorne Effect. We believe the answers lie in the centering concept itself. Centering combines concepts that not only permit but actually encourage relevant staff development. Key among the unique features that differentiate center activities from "regular" school system inservice training are: quick response capability, voluntary participation, freedom from supervisory evaluation, confidentiality of participant records, reliance on the professionalism of staffs to participate in defining their own needs and planning how to meet them, encouragement of teacher-teacher dialogue and sharing, and the ability to work cooperatively with all agencies and projects responsible for inservice in Detroit schools.

Detroit staffs have demonstrated that they embrace centering as an effective vehicle for bridging the professional gap between the college and public school classrooms, between what is learned and what actually works with K-12 students. A prime reason often cited by participants (and many do write unsolicited fan letters) for attending Center-sponsored activities is that the consultants are knowledgeable, relevant, skilled at blending theory with workable practices, and are available for follow-up reinforcement after a seminar experience is completed. It is possible for The Center to attract such professionally capable people because the design provides for broad-based interinstitutional cooperation in

the two aspects of the governance structure:

1. The five-member Center Governance Board is composed of the educational leaders whose cooperative persistence resulted in the funding/establishment of the state-funded project: the dean of Wayne State University's College of Education, the superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools, the superintendent of Wayne County Intermediate School District, the president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, and the president of the (Detroit) Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors. Although the composition of this Board differs markedly from the 51 percent teacher membership mandated in the Federal Teacher Center legislation, the Detroit Board works effectively and efficiently. Its success can be attributed to several important reasons: (a) The Board functions on a consensus-basis. Any one of the five members can veto a program, if in his or her opinion, it would be ineffective or inappropriate. The result has been that all deliberations are issue-centered; no member has ever had to exercise the right of veto; (b) Each participant-group (teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators) has representation on the Governance Board; (c) Although the Board sets policy, an advisory committee structure provides for additional broad input; (d) The governance structure was designed to meet the

discrete needs of the Detroit system.

2. Five advisory committees (in addition to the Governance Board) participate in the establishment of The Center's programmatic direction and priorities. These committees--Reading, Mathematics, Paraprofessional, Evaluation, and General Center Advisory--have members who represent teachers and educators from twenty-five organizations and colleges in southeastern Michigan and have vested interests in the education of Detroit's children. Their diversity has assured an absence of parochialism; from this group have come many of The Center's finest ideas for programs. One merits special recognition. It was the General Center Advisory Committee that suggested and took the leadership in developing a model which allows college credit to be given on an interinstitutional basis for select courses specifically and cooperatively designed by Center staff and teacher participants.

Thus, The Detroit Center is an example of a workable marriage between the town and the gown. From this solid support base, the project is able to serve pre-service students assigned to Detroit schools from cooperating institutions, college faculties, as well as Detroit school personnel.

Problems? Of course The Detroit Center has experienced some. Most have arisen from the need for multi-year rather than the present annual funding. A two-year funding cycle

would provide increased "breathing time" for programmatic development before the trauma of the funding ritual plagued The Center staff and Governance Board. Significantly, there has never been a problem or question about The Center's ability to respond to the inservice needs of Detroit educators. Perhaps even more important is the recognition that pupil achievement is improving with appropriate, systematic staff development.

Teacher centers ought not be viewed as the single, definitive, long-awaited panacea for solving all staff development problems in American education: Educators must continuously seek out fresh and better ways to enhance their abilities to educate today's students. Rather, the centering concept should be examined as one that has been successful in involving educators in addressing their own teaching/learning needs. Certainly, this has been true at The Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development--and at a significant number of other centers throughout the nation. The availability of federal funds, which encourages school districts and institutions of higher education to develop centers either independently or in collaboration, should give impetus to the emergence of a variety of models. Teacher educators should be stimulated to discover, utilize, and refine the centering concept; the potential for bridging the professional development gap is great.